

# The Princess Storyteller, Clara Clarifier, Quincy Questioner, and the Wizard: Reciprocal teaching adapted for kindergarten students

*Reciprocal-teaching strategies were used in a kindergarten class to teach comprehension through interactive read-alouds.*

As the school day began, Oscar (all names are pseudonyms), a shy second-language learner, came up to me and told me he had been thinking about the book I had read the day before. He mentioned that he had not known why Miss Nelson, the main character, was missing and that he had a “Clara Clarifier” question to ask me. He said he hadn’t understood why Detective McSmogg was now looking for Viola Swamp at the end of the story. I was very surprised because I had never experienced a kindergartner asking me to explain something he did not understand the day after I read a story. Other students were listening, and before I had a chance to answer, Jesse, a student with great difficulty expressing his ideas, said to Oscar, “But it’s a joke, because Miss Nelson is Viola Swamp.” Oscar didn’t respond. He listened quietly while other students retold parts of the story and explained to him why this was a joke. Melissa said, “I predict Detective McSmogg will find the black dress in Miss Nelson’s closet, and then he’ll know what happened.”

I stood by in silence, watching my students enthusiastically discuss a book using strategies they had learned during our reciprocal-teaching lessons. These strategies include summarizing, seeking clarification, questioning, and making predictions. I was reminded of conversations I had had with some of my colleagues about my plan to adapt

reciprocal-teaching strategies for kindergarten students. They had been skeptical, believing that 5-year-olds were too young for such a sophisticated learning strategy. However, it became evident to me, while listening to my students’ responses, that my colleagues had been wrong. Adapting reciprocal-teaching strategies for kindergarten students had been extremely successful.

## A new focus

At the beginning of that school year, the teachers at my school decided to focus the school plan on reading comprehension. We were concerned that, while a large number of students were able to decode text successfully, they were not always able to understand what they were reading. This concern is shared by many, including the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). With so much emphasis on decoding in the primary grades, comprehension issues have often been ignored; yet even with very young students, comprehension of text is critical. It is, therefore, essential that kindergarten teachers teach students the comprehension skills they need to succeed as future readers.

A way to do this is by teaching students strategies such as those found in reciprocal teaching. These strategies can be taught to nonreaders through read-alouds. Read-alouds help students become interested in literature and provide opportunities for teachers to introduce comprehension strategies. It was my intent to study the implications

of adapting reciprocal teaching with kindergarten students to improve their comprehension strategies.

According to the California state standards for language arts (California State Board of Education, 1999), kindergarten students must be able to use pictures and context to make predictions about a story. Their responses should be based on their own life experiences. Students must also be able to retell a story and to ask and answer questions about text.

To help my students meet these standards, I wanted to find an interactive teaching model that would address the standards and allow students to share responsibility for their own learning. The model should also provide insights on the connections students make between their background knowledge and the text. This would help me assess and guide their instruction. The model that came to mind was reciprocal teaching. Because I had used reciprocal teaching with older students, I knew it was effective for promoting reading comprehension and metacognitive skills such as self-monitoring, assessing progress, and taking remedial action when needed (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

Reciprocal teaching is used with students at academic risk who have difficulty comprehending complex text. In reciprocal teaching, students learn to summarize, ask questions, seek clarification, and make predictions about text. These are the very strategies that the California standards deem necessary to teach to students in kindergarten. Reciprocal teaching is traditionally done with small groups, and I wondered if kindergarten students could discuss books in a cooperative group. How would it work for students unable to read text by themselves?

### ***What the experts say about reading aloud***

Reading aloud to children is the most highly recommended activity for parents and teachers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). The benefits for all children are numerous (Campbell, 2001). Children learn that there is a difference between oral and written language, that print carries meaning, and that print on a page has associated sounds (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000). Kindergartners who frequently had stories read to them were better able to infer causal relationships from illustrations and to relate them to episodes in the stories, a strategy that may help them as they

become readers (Feitelstein, Goldstein, Iraqi, & Share, 1993). Furthermore, research shows there is a correlation between how often children have been read to and their future academic success (Morrow, 1992).

Read-alouds assist all students in language acquisition by enabling them to become familiar with the academic or literary language necessary for school success (Sénéchal, Thomas, & Monker, 1995). For example, research shows that second-language learners acquire vocabulary and grammar from read-alouds (Feitelstein et al., 1993; Morrow, 1992), and read-alouds can improve young students' comprehension of decontextualized language (Beck & McKeown, 2001). Kindergarten students who have been read to are more likely to emerge as readers earlier than those who did not often hear stories (Sulzby, 1985).

### ***What the experts say about reciprocal teaching***

Reciprocal teaching is viewed as an excellent tool to improve students' comprehension (Pressley, 2002). It was created by Palincsar and Brown (1984) and is rooted in the theoretical work of Lev Vygotsky, who developed the concepts of the zone of proximal development and of children giving support to one another (scaffolding). In reciprocal teaching, students are taught to preview a text in order to make predictions about what they might find in the reading. This strategy enables students to set a purpose for reading and to self-monitor their comprehension. During reciprocal-teaching lessons, students ask questions to help clarify comprehension issues or to create deeper understanding. Students learn to summarize what they have read. Reciprocal-teaching lessons are traditionally used with small groups, and students take on leadership roles, or "play the teacher" in guiding the lessons.

These strategies enable students to self-monitor text through cooperative interaction (Stahl, 2004). During guided practice, a teacher asks student leaders to initiate discussions of text and to react to other students' answers or opinions. An assumption of reciprocal teaching is that, while scaffolding is provided by the teacher only when needed, comprehension strategies are internalized through participation in these discussions (Marks et al., 1993).

Reciprocal-teaching strategies have been used with students as early as first grade (Coley, DePinto, Craig, & Gardner, 1993).

## **Introducing kindergarten children to reciprocal teaching**

Based on a review of research, I decided to create a series of lessons that adapted reciprocal-teaching strategies for my kindergartners using read-alouds. It is important for my students to have a structure for leading book discussions, but many small steps would have to be taken before my plan could fully unfold. A first-grade teacher, Sharon Craig, had successfully used reciprocal teaching with her students, and her experience gave me ideas for how to begin my project (Coley et al., 1993). Like Craig, I felt it was necessary to adapt reciprocal-teaching methods to address the needs of my students.

Young children can construct and express their learning by the use of props during dramatic play (Soundy, 1993). I use puppets in my class to make lessons engaging or to model behavior. Although I have not found reference in the research to the use of puppets in reciprocal-teaching lessons, I use them to make the lessons more enjoyable and assist my children in generating language and finding their "voices" when learning the strategies. Four puppets were chosen to personify the reciprocal-teaching strategies. The Princess Storyteller summarized the story; boy and girl puppets became Quincy Questioner and Clara Clarifier; and the Wizard predicted what would happen next in the story. In order to teach these strategies, I introduced and modeled each one as think-alouds while reading stories to the students during the first month of school.

Although traditional reciprocal teaching is used to help older children read and comprehend unfamiliar texts, I adapted my lessons by choosing books that the children had heard several times. Researchers have shown that repeated readings help children internalize stories and understand them in greater detail (Teale & Sulzby, 1987). Moreover, repeated readings reinforce language patterns and story sequencing for second-language learners (Hough, Nurss, & Enright, 1986). This was especially important for my second-language

learners, who I felt needed familiarity with the text before they could discuss it in depth.

Reciprocal teaching traditionally is used with small groups working independently. Due to classroom management concerns, and because the strategies would be modeled and taught during read-alouds, the reciprocal-teaching lessons I presented were done with the whole class. This instruction provided opportunities for all students to participate in the lesson, not just those leading the discussion. Other students could answer questions, offer opinions, and give suggestions to help the student leaders if needed, creating a more truly interactive discussion.

Teachers introduce reciprocal teaching to students by modeling the strategies. When students understand them, the teacher encourages students to work cooperatively and independently. The teacher acts as a facilitator only when necessary. With kindergarten students, I found that I had to play a much more active role in the lessons. For example, sometimes students had difficulty organizing their thoughts when they had to retell a story or ask a clarifying question. I would ask the class if anyone could think of things that the Princess might want to add to the retelling or if they could help the puppets ask questions. Students could raise their hands and give suggestions. Instead of directly modeling a response, I guided the student responses with help from the other students.

Reciprocal teaching is flexible, and teachers are not restricted to following a prescribed set of rules (Oczkus, 2003). With older readers it can be used at the beginning or at various stages of a story. Kindergarten students usually have limited attention spans, so I decided to pause during a read-aloud at an exciting place or at a spot that presented opportunities for questions and discussions so that students could apply reciprocal-teaching strategies to the story. The lesson began by having four students sit in chairs in front of the class. Using the puppets, these students would retell the story, ask questions about the text, and predict how the story would end.

## **Step-by-step guided instruction**

Sharon Craig (Coley et al., 1993) found that it was necessary to teach individual strategies to her

first-grade students over a period of time before engaging them in a reciprocal-teaching lesson. I knew that I would not be able to use reciprocal-teaching strategies in an integrated lesson without first teaching them one at a time to my kindergartners.

### ***Retelling or summarizing***

Many kindergarten children have an understanding of and are able to describe the basic elements of story structure, including characters, settings, and plot episodes (Applebee, 1978). Retelling stories sequentially with relevant details is very challenging for most kindergartners at the beginning of the year, particularly those who have not been read to frequently. Children absorb information from books while an adult reads, but they need guided practice and opportunities to manipulate visual images to learn how to retell a story effectively. One way to teach retelling is with a storyboard to introduce the concepts of character, setting, events, and problems. Unfortunately, only a few well-known stories are available as storyboard packages. Without visual images to manipulate, it is extremely challenging for students to retell a story sequentially using details. It is likely that stories will be fractured, with important elements out of sequence, unexplained, or missing (Morrow, 1985).

Dramatic play has been shown to help students increase their comprehension of stories (Owocki, 1999). Throughout the year, I use puppets in class to provide scaffolding when explaining concepts or modeling desired behaviors. To assist students with retelling, a Princess hand puppet was designated the storyteller. The students were told that the Princess's job was to make "a long story short." She had to retell the story for them in just a few short sentences. The students were very excited and eager to hold the puppet. To practice retelling sequentially with essential story elements, the students visualized the parts of the story, just as if we had storyboard pieces to use. Students contributed remembered parts of the story and we sequenced and prioritized these events. The student holding the Princess puppet then had to repeat the sequence to the class. Students could raise their hands and politely remind the Princess of the agreed-upon sequencing. In this way, every student in the class could participate in the discussion.

Students were always eager to participate in the lessons, but sometimes natural shyness made them nervous about speaking in front of the class, and I had to remind them to hold up the puppet and let the Princess tell the story. This made an almost immediate difference in a student's ability to speak. For example, at the beginning of the lessons, Jesse, who would eventually become very good at retelling a story, was unable to even start when he had the role of the storyteller. Students who had difficulty with the assigned role could pass, and for the first two lessons, Jesse, who had eagerly raised his hand and wanted to hold the puppet, would say, "Pass," and wait for me to ask three or four other students to help him. By the third lesson, he told me that he wanted to do it himself this time. He said, "I know the story. I don't need help."

### ***Questioning***

From the first day of school, informally and through guided instruction, my students had multiple opportunities to learn how to share information and ask questions. Kindergarten teachers will certainly agree that students in their classes often cannot distinguish between what it means to ask a question and to tell a story. Often, instead of a question, a student will make a statement that expresses an opinion or relates to their own experience. When I read stories to the class, students are encouraged to stop me and ask questions if they don't understand something. Typically, this has been limited to asking what a word means. Students had never stopped a reading to say that they just didn't understand parts of a story.

To introduce questioning strategies, the students were told that as they listened, I was going to stop reading at places in the story and pretend that I didn't understand something. I would think aloud and ask myself a clarifying question. As I read, I would pause and say to the class, "I think I need clarification about something I just read. I don't understand why...." Instead of answering my own question, I let the students do the thinking for me, asking them to help me answer the question. Several students could respond, and although each response was validated, I continued to ask for ideas until a correct response was given or it became necessary for me to further guide the students'

comprehension. Either way, this created lively discussions.

Good readers actively monitor their understanding by questioning and clarifying their comprehension as they read (Marzola, 1988). One of the goals of reciprocal teaching is to help students think more deeply about text and to learn to self-monitor comprehension by teaching them to ask questions and seek clarification for what they read. My students needed to learn to ask questions about the stories they had heard. Moreover, they had to understand that there are two types of questions. One kind of question asks for information that is easy to answer with a short response, but other questions are open ended and require critical thinking. To help them understand, I introduced the students to two puppet characters who would help me tell the story. I told them that Quincy Questioner asks easy questions to find out "who was listening to the story." These questions could be answered with a "yes" or "no" or a short answer. Clara Clarifier, on the other hand, doesn't always understand everything in the story and needs help. She asks questions for which answers may or may not be found in the story.

### **Predicting**

Reciprocal-teaching lessons with older students often begin by having them preview a text and guess what will happen. This can be done before or during a reading. Predicting is a strategy that helps students learn to set a purpose for reading a text and monitor their comprehension (Oczkus, 2003). I always begin read-alouds by asking students to look at the title and cover illustrations to guess what they think the story will be about. Many students are familiar with the idea that wizards have magical powers to see into the future. It was natural, then, to use a Wizard puppet to help students predict what would happen in a read-aloud.

After students had retold the story and asked two kinds of questions, the student who held the Wizard puppet predicted what would happen next. This was the easiest strategy for students to learn because they had heard the stories at least once. The Wizard was a more comfortable role for those students who were shy or had difficulty paying attention or organizing their thoughts.

### **Data collection and analysis**

To see if reciprocal teaching would improve student comprehension of read-alouds, I collected interviews with students at the beginning and end of the research project and anecdotal records on students' responses to lessons. I also created rubrics that assessed students' story retelling and questioning. I was the only one to analyze the data from this project; however, triangulation of the data provided an in-depth perspective on the effectiveness of the lessons.

Data were collected on all of the students, but for the purposes of this study, four students were selected as a focus group. Each student performed all of the roles in the reciprocal-teaching lessons. In order to have a representative sample of the students in my class, I chose two who are second-language learners and two native English speakers. I wanted to choose a student who was performing at or above grade level and one who was struggling academically for both groups. Oscar and Filiberto are both second-language learners. Spanish is their primary language. They are both classified as Limited English Proficient based on the California English Language Development Test, but Oscar was successful academically while Filiberto had difficulty learning in class. Jesse is an English-only student who is seeing a speech therapist because of receptive and expressive language difficulties. He often finds it challenging to understand what is asked of him. Melissa is an English-only student who is working above grade level but is very shy and rarely wants to participate in class discussions.

Interviews with the four focus group students were conducted at the beginning and end of the three-month research project. (See Table 1.) These questions determined whether students liked to hear stories and which stories they preferred. I also asked students whether they thought they always understood the stories they heard read aloud. Students were asked what they could do when an adult is reading aloud if they didn't understand a word or the story was confusing. I transcribed the students' responses on the questionnaire.

Based on the California Language arts standards, I created three-point rubrics to assess students' progress in retelling a story using details from the text (Table 2) and asking questions about vocabulary or the meaning of the story (Table 3).

**TABLE 1**  
**Interview questions**

**Question 1.**  
Do you like to hear stories?

**Question 2.**  
What kinds of stories do you like to hear?

**Question 3.**  
Do you always understand everything in the stories that are read to you?

**Question 4.**  
If there is a word in a story, or something about the story, that you don't understand, what do you usually do?

**Question 5.**  
What could you do if you don't understand something in a story?

Each time students participated in a lesson, I rated their contribution. Retelling the story was the most difficult task for the students, and the rubric is more complex than the rubric for questioning. For students to score a 3 in retelling, they had to relate a story sequentially using details from the text. They needed to explain who the main characters were, describe the setting, and state the problem. A score of 2 indicated that students could retell parts of a story, but it might not have been sequential. They may or may not have been able to refer to character, setting, or problem. A score of 1 meant that the student could not tell the story sequentially and descriptions of story elements were limited.

The rubric for scoring a student's ability to ask questions about the text is much simpler (Table 3). A score of 3 was given if a student could ask a question that called for clarification about something that might be confusing in the text, or if she or he asked the other students for opinions about something occurring in the story. If the student was in the role of Quincy Questioner, I gave the stu-

dent a 3 if they asked a question based on a literal recall of the text. A score of 2 meant that the student could ask a clarifying question, but the answer may have been obvious from the story. Also, this score was given if the student was in the role of Clara Clarifier and asked a simple question that did not call for deeper comprehension. A score of 1 was given to students who needed much support from me or other students to formulate a question.

Assigning scores in this way was not only a tool for evaluating student performance, but it also helped me to monitor each student's growth. For the three months of the study, each of the focus children performed two of the four roles once a week. Their scores guided me in making teaching decisions, such as assigning students to the roles of reteller or questioner when I saw that they needed more practice learning these skills. For example, when Melissa became competent at retelling, I assigned her to the role of Clara Clarifier so that she would have practice in that leadership position.

**TABLE 2**  
**Retelling rubric**

- 3 – The student can retell events in a story sequentially, using appropriate details. Tells who the most important characters are in the story. Can describe the setting and the problem.
- 2 – The student can retell events, but retelling may or may not be sequential. Student may give only a partial description of the characters, setting, or problem.
- 1 – The student cannot retell many events in the story. Student has a very incomplete description of the characters, setting, or problem.

**TABLE 3**  
**Questioning rubric**

- 3 – The student can ask a question that calls for clarification of something that might be confusing in a read-aloud. This may be a question about vocabulary or meaning. The student understands the difference between a clarifying question and a question that is based on a literal recall of the text.
- 2 – The student can ask a clarifying question, but the answer may have been obvious in the story. In the role of Clara Clarifier, instead of asking a clarifying question, the student asks a question that is based on a literal recall of the text.
- 1 – The student has great difficulty formulating a question and relies on teacher support.

The anecdotal records I kept on the students' responses during the study were valuable for measuring results. I recorded student responses on an observation sheet during the lessons (see Table 4) and kept a journal of remarks students made at other times about what they were learning. The responses students made spontaneously as the project evolved gave me keen insights on what they were thinking. Sometimes a student who was not in a leadership role would correct another if a student holding a puppet had misunderstood his or her task. For example, Jesse raised his hand one day to tell Melissa that she had asked a clarifying question when she, as Quincy Questioner, was only supposed to ask a simple recall question.

My anecdotal records of the lessons provided valuable insight on how students transfer background knowledge to the read-alouds. For example, after reading *The Dog Who Loved Kittens* (Robertus, 1991), Oscar, who doesn't have a pet, asked why Baxter the dog had to sleep outside when Eloise's kittens were born. Melissa raised her hand and explained that when her cat had kittens, her mom was worried that their dog might be jealous and hurt the kittens. Other students raised their hands, offering opinions based on their experiences with pets. Anecdotal records like these helped me plan instruction in other areas of the curriculum. For example, when Filiberto wanted to know why the birds didn't want the bat to be on their team in *The Great Ball Game: A Muskogee Story* (Bruchac, 1994), I learned that many students did not understand that bats, although they have wings, are really mammals. I realized that the students needed a minilesson on the differences between birds and mammals.

## What the findings say

The data used to assess the success of this project are rich with information. An analysis of the interviews, the storytelling and questioning rubrics, and my anecdotal records reveals that by the end of the three-month research project, the students were able to reflect on themselves as learners and to self-monitor their comprehension. They had learned strategies that allowed them to control their cognitive processes. The complex process of listening to and comprehending a read-aloud had become easier for them. They were able to retell stories succinctly but with appropriate details. The students asked questions when they needed to clarify their comprehension of a read-aloud. They were able to make logical predictions about what would happen next in a story.

All of the children responded enthusiastically to having stories read to them. Filiberto said that his favorite part of kindergarten was read-alouds, and he liked all of the stories he heard. Oscar and Melissa said they preferred stories about animals, and Jesse liked funny books. To determine if the students had the ability to reflect on their cognitive processes, they were asked if they thought they had always understood the stories that they had

**TABLE 4**  
**Reciprocal teaching observation recording sheet**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Student's name \_\_\_\_\_

Princess Storyteller \_\_\_\_\_

Clara Clarifier \_\_\_\_\_

Quincy Questioner \_\_\_\_\_

Wizard \_\_\_\_\_

Audience \_\_\_\_\_

Student's response/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Is the student paying attention? \_\_\_\_\_

Is the student cooperating respectfully with the other students? \_\_\_\_\_

Any other pertinent observations: \_\_\_\_\_

heard in read-alouds. Initially, in interviews at the beginning of the project, all four children had said they always understood everything in the stories. Oscar told me, "I'm a smart boy. I know all the stories." However, I knew from observation that he hadn't understood everything. For example, the three boys were often not able to answer the questions I asked when checking for comprehension. When I asked the children if they felt that they had always understood all of the words in the stories, Melissa admitted that sometimes she hadn't, but the three boys remained adamant that they had understood everything. The students also differed in their responses concerning what they could do if they didn't understand a word or a part of a story. In the initial interview, Melissa said she could ask the teacher, but she hadn't wanted to because she was afraid she would be a bother. Jesse said he would ask his mom when he got home. Oscar insisted he had understood all the stories because he knew a lot

of English. Filiberto said he had not known what to do.

In the second interview, after the class had practiced reciprocal-teaching strategies for three months, all four students reported important changes in their abilities to reflect on their cognitive processing and understanding during read-alouds. Each of the students readily conceded that often he or she had not understood everything in a story. Oscar and Filiberto both agreed that there are many words in books that they didn't know. Oscar admitted, "Maybe it would be better if I knew what all the words meant." When asked what they could do when they didn't understand something, all four students said they could raise their hands and tell the teacher they had a Clara Clarifying question. They could ask the teacher to think aloud and explain what a word meant or ask for clarification about what was happening in a story.

Over the three-month study, every student in the class had an opportunity to hold the puppets



and assume a leadership position once a week. Students were assigned a score based on my rubric whenever they retold or asked questions about the stories. Learning to ask questions to clarify understanding was relatively easy for the three boys, who modeled questions after those that I had posed as think-alouds. Whenever I asked for students to volunteer for a specific leadership position, the three boys eagerly chose to hold the Clara Clarifier puppet. By the end of the first month, all three boys were able to ask questions that required critical thinking and received scores of 3 on the rubric. They could ask questions that called for either an explanation or an opinion. In the role of Clara Clarifier, Oscar asked the class, "Do you think it was very nice for the little pig to eat the wolf at the end of the story?" In the same role, Jesse asked the class, "I don't know why the gingerbread boy wanted to run away. What do you guys think?" It was interesting that it took nearly two months before the boys were able to ask simple questions without prompting. It appeared that they wanted to clarify their understanding at a deeper level, even when they were holding Quincy Questioner, whose job was to ask literal questions. Melissa, I knew, was able to comprehend stories better than the other three students, but she had greater difficulty learning to ask clarifying questions and never received a score higher than a 2 on the questioning rubric. She was adept at asking simple questions as Quincy Questioner, but she did not volunteer to lead the group and ask clarifying questions.

Learning to retell the story sequentially and with details from the text was a challenge for all of the students. Melissa was able to use this strategy successfully after four weeks of practice, but the three boys needed more time to learn how to retell the story. This was not surprising because Oscar and Filiberto are second-language learners and Jesse has expressive language difficulty. Oscar was shy and initially reluctant to retell the story. He would often say, "Pass," when asked to retell a story. Filiberto and Jesse did not have problems with shyness and enjoyed taking the retelling role. The challenge for them was to keep their responses brief and sequential. Their retellings were lengthy, convoluted, and missing important details from the text. It was often necessary for me to restate their responses with appropriate structure or to call on other students to help the two boys sequence and prioritize their sum-

maries. It helped if I reminded them to start their retellings by naming the characters and restating the problem. For example, one day, I said, "This a story about a dog named Baxter who takes care of kittens when the mother cat is away." Despite differences in personalities and needs, by the end of the second month of reciprocal-teaching practice, the boys were receiving scores of 2 for retelling. At the end of the project, all four students were consistently able to meet the requirements of retelling to receive a score of 3 on the rubric.

During the lessons, I recorded students' responses when holding the puppets. I also kept a record of significant or insightful replies the students made when they were not holding the puppets. It was important for me that the students were on task and cooperating respectfully. From the very beginning, the three boys were eager to participate in these lessons. They were always very disappointed when they were not chosen to hold a puppet, but they enthusiastically volunteered to answer questions posed by the other students. Melissa rarely raised her hand to answer a question or make suggestions to help other students when they were holding puppets. As a consequence, I often asked her if she would help another student, which she was always willing to do. In this way, I was able to gauge that she was paying attention even though she was not forthcoming about participating in the lessons.

The students had been practicing reciprocal teaching for nearly a month before I began to see them transferring what they were learning to other activities. One day during a social studies lesson on various types of homes in our community, Jesse stopped me and said, "I have a clarifying question. I don't know what a condo is." I was delighted that he was able to use one of the strategies he had learned during the read-alouds. I explained to the students what Jesse had done and praised him effusively for remembering what he had learned and for not hesitating to apply it to a new learning situation. After that, the students were delightfully irrepressible in showing off what they had learned.

## Limitations of the study

This study was conducted as a classroom action-research project and provided keen insights

on the comprehension development of the students in my classroom. The results of the study, however, are limited because other classes were not involved, and the number of students included in the project was limited to only the students in my classroom, in particular, to the four students featured in the research. Although there were more English-only students in the classroom, the four students were equally divided between second-language learners and English-only students. A similar study in the future could be strengthened by having more students included in the focus sample and having others review the data.

Another limitation of this action-research project was that the lessons were taught as a whole-class activity. This was successful because many students could participate in each lesson, creating more dynamic and thoughtful discussions, but eventually it would be interesting to see if kindergarten students are able to participate in much smaller and more traditional reciprocal teaching groups.

In retrospect, using only familiar texts limited students' opportunities to use picture and context clues to make predictions about the stories. As previously discussed, using texts the students had already heard was beneficial for them because they had greater recall and comprehension, but it did not build the critical or inferential thinking strategies necessary for predicting logical sequencing in a story.

## Kindergartners are not too young

This study shows that kindergarten teachers can use reciprocal-teaching strategies to help students meet the expectations of the language arts standards. Kindergarten students are not too young to learn strategies that will help them assume responsibility for their own learning and to lead discussion groups for their peers.

In the three months I used reciprocal-teaching strategies with my students, I learned that students become more aware of the complexities of plot, character development, and vocabulary when given opportunities to ask their own questions about the text. They are capable of thinking metacognitively and asking questions that arise from thinking critically. By showing students that it's all right for them to ask questions when they don't understand something and teaching them how to ask those

questions, students' comprehension and involvement in read-alouds increased.

Students who, at the beginning of these lessons, were not even aware that it was appropriate to seek deeper levels of meaning and understanding from stories, were suddenly empowered. Oscar, Filiberto, Jesse, Melissa, and the other students in my class began asking me and one another questions about books and vocabulary throughout the day. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, students asked me about books that I had read the day before and even a week or so earlier. Children were clearly showing me that they were thinking about what they had heard. Parts of stories that seemed unclear to them when first heard could now be questioned. Sometimes students asked so many questions when I read that it was difficult to keep up the flow of the read-aloud, and we had to establish rules for when it was appropriate to interrupt the story and ask a question. As a class, we agreed that I would stop at least twice during each read-aloud so that the children could ask questions or offer their thoughts about the story. Students often prefaced their questions by saying, "Ms. Myers, I think this is a good place for a think-aloud because I have a clarifying question."

This action-research project offers anecdotal evidence that shows that kindergarten students, particularly second-language learners and students who have difficulty with expressive language, can benefit from adapted reciprocal teaching. It is often said that kindergarten teachers lay the foundation stones for children's future academic success. It is my hope, therefore, that other kindergarten teachers will adapt reciprocal teaching to meet the needs of their students.

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